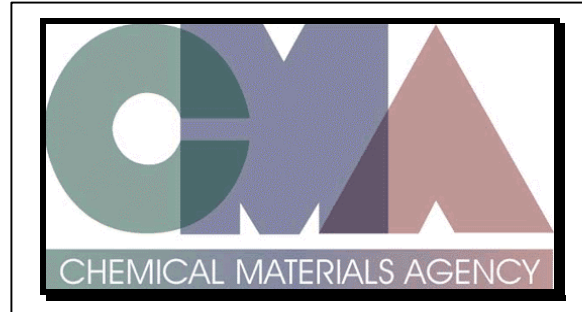


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**For Immediate Release**

**July 31, 2003**

**DATE SET TO BEGIN DESTRUCTION OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS**

**ANNISTON ARMY DEPOT, Ala.** – Army officials here have announced the date they will begin safely treating and disposing of chemical weapons at the Anniston Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (ANCDF), a process that will eliminate the more than 40-year presence of stored chemical weapons in Alabama.

The Army anticipates that the first M-55 rocket filled with nerve agent GB should be destroyed in the ANCDF on August 6, 2003. The decision to start was made by Acting Secretary of the Army Les Brownlee, who said, "The Army has endeavored throughout its planning process to ensure the safe destruction of these chemical munitions. Public safety remains our principal interest."

The Army intends to begin operations utilizing a "limited burn" approach until certain schools and community facilities are over-pressurized this fall. Under this approach, the Army will only process M-55 rockets containing nerve agent GB. The rockets will be punched, drained of GB agent, and sheared on a continual basis. The sheared rocket pieces will be disposed of in the Deactivation Furnace System in accordance with the ANCDF permit. Rocket lots that have been identified as potentially containing gelled agent will not be processed during this initial period. The GB agent drained from the rockets will be collected and stored in the Agent Collection System. It will be disposed of in the Liquid Incinerator only during certain pre-announced periods that will be limited to weekends and the hours of 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. on weekdays.

**(More)**

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The Army will ramp up to full operations once the school and community facility over-pressurization projects are completed this fall. In addition, the Army will continue to implement actions previously agreed to with state and local officials related to the special needs population; the activation of sirens, tone alert radios and the Emergency Alert System; and the use of updated toxicity thresholds for community emergency preparedness planning.

“Our community has been waiting a very long time for us to begin safely treating and disposing of the chemical weapons that have been stored at Anniston since 1961,” said Timothy K. Garrett, the government’s site project manager. “We have a work force of more than 745 well trained and highly motivated government and contractor personnel. The team and the facility are ready for us to commence operations.”

Army officials plan to conduct a series of information briefings for the general public during the coming weeks to describe how ANCDF workers will safely destroy the chemical weapons. The first series of meetings will be Monday, August 4<sup>th</sup> at 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. and Tuesday, August 5<sup>th</sup> at 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. The meetings will be held in the Anniston Community Outreach Office located at 11 East Tenth Street in Anniston (256-238-0120). More meetings will be scheduled soon in other Calhoun County communities as well as in Cleburne, Clay, Etowah, Saint Clair, and Talladega Counties. Locations, dates, and times will be announced.

As of July 27<sup>th</sup>, the Army has safely treated and destroyed more than 16,210,000 pounds of chemical weapons at two other facilities using the baseline technology, normally referred to as incineration, the same technology process that will be implemented at ANCDF. All 2,031 tons of chemical agent that was stored on Johnston Atoll Island in the Pacific have been destroyed. That facility is currently being permanently closed. In addition, more than 6,075 tons of chemicals have been destroyed in Utah at the Tooele Chemical Agent Disposal Facility since operations began in 1996.

At Anniston Army Depot, there are 2,254 tons of GB and VX nerve agents and mustard agent in hundreds of thousands of rockets, artillery shells, mortars, land mines, and large containers in storage in a high-security area. The first of the weapons to be destroyed are M-55 rockets filled with GB nerve agent. Nerve agent VX weapons will be destroyed after all of the GB weapons are eliminated. The last campaign will be weapons filled with HD and HT mustard agents.

Army officials from the U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency (Provisional), the agency overseeing the chemical weapons storage and disposal programs, believe it will take approximately seven years to safely destroy the entire Anniston stockpile. As outlined in the law, the Governor of Alabama and the Secretary of the Army will determine closure requirements of the ANCDF once the stockpile is safely destroyed.

**(More)**

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Once operations begin in Alabama, the Anniston facility will join two other facilities, located in Utah and Maryland, in actively reducing the risk nearby communities face through continued storage of chemical warfare materiel. The U.S. chemical agent stockpile has been reduced by more than 26 percent. Besides Anniston, facilities at Pine Bluff, Ark., Newport, Ind., Umatilla, Ore., should begin treating and destroying chemical weapons in the coming months. Facilities have yet to be constructed at Blue Grass, Ky., and Pueblo, Colo.

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